

## Jobcentre Plus national customer satisfaction survey 2005

By Ian Sanderson, Yvette Fidler and Penny Wymer,  
Policy Research Institute, Leeds Metropolitan University

This report presents the results of a national telephone survey of Jobcentre Plus customers undertaken in January to March 2005. The main objectives of the survey were: to provide robust representative data on customers' experience and satisfaction; to assess changes from the 2004 national survey; to track customers' views on the new integrated Jobcentre Plus service; and to provide information to drive the performance improvement agenda and help in setting customer service targets.

The survey was conducted by telephone with 3381 Jobcentre Plus customers, including claimants of Jobseekers' Allowance, Income Support and Incapacity Benefit. This represents a response rate of 55 per cent of those contacted for the survey. A quota sampling methodology was adopted with acknowledged limitations relative to the theoretical ideal of probability random sampling, which was impractical for this survey. It is considered that a quota telephone survey, with weighting of results to the known customer profile, provides appropriate and robust data.

A national booster survey of ethnic minority customers was undertaken in parallel with the main survey and the findings are reported separately. In order to avoid potential confusion over different sets of data, the present report does not contain results relating to ethnic minorities.

### Key findings

Overall levels of satisfaction with services increased between 2004 and 2005 from 81 per cent to 86 per cent of respondents very or fairly satisfied.

Awareness of the Customers' Charter increased from 26 per cent of all respondents aware in 2004 to 29 per cent in 2005. Awareness is particularly low amongst younger people and decreased amongst the under 25s from 16 per cent in 2004 to 11 per cent in 2005.

Overall 13 per cent of respondents felt that they had grounds for complaint, unchanged from 2004, but only three per cent had actually made a complaint over the previous six months (little changed from four per cent in 2004). Younger people and shorter term JSA customers were most likely to have felt like complaining.

Respondents continue to give good performance ratings (approaching 60 per cent 'very good') to aspects of service relating to how they were treated by staff, for example, friendliness and politeness and being treated with respect. However, some aspects of the quality of service provided continue to receive rather lower ratings (less than 50 per cent 'very good'), for example finding out about vacancies and benefits and knowledge of staff.

As in 2004, the majority of customers (about two thirds) perceived little change in the quality of the service provided over the past year, but the proportion who felt that the service had improved increased from 25 per cent to 30 per cent.

Respondents in areas covered by new integrated Jobcentre Plus offices continue to give higher performance ratings to aspects of office facilities and environment than users of legacy Jobcentres and Social Security offices. They were also more likely to perceive that the service had improved over the past year.

## Executive summary

### Contact with the Agency

The proportion of customers who normally contacted the Agency by telephone increased between 2004 and 2005 from 51 to 56 per cent and those who normally visited an office declined from 41 to 38 per cent. This is consistent with the increasing use of Contact Centres. The largest shifts towards telephone contact and away from personal visits are amongst IB respondents, those who normally deal with a Social Security office, females and younger respondents aged under 25.

For 86 per cent of JSA customers the last reported contact was to sign on/attend a Fortnightly Jobseeker Review (FJR) and/or search for vacancies and this mainly involved visits to offices. On the other hand, the main purpose of contact for IB and IS customers related to enquiries about benefits and these were mainly made by telephone. There was little change in this pattern between 2004 and 2005.

Of those who had written to the Agency within the past six months, where a reply was relevant, 59 per cent reported receiving it within 10 working days (not significantly changed from 60 per cent in 2004); 15 per cent reported that they had not received a reply (unchanged from 2004).

### Customers' Charter and complaints

Awareness of the Customer Charter increased between 2004 and 2005 from 26 to 29 per cent of all respondents. Differences in terms of age and gender have become more marked with increased awareness amongst males and those aged 25 and over.

Overall, 13 per cent of respondents had felt like complaining about the service during the past six months (unchanged from 2004). The proportion who had felt like complaining remained above average amongst JSA customers, those aged under 25 and shorter-term claimants.

The main reasons stated for feeling like complaining were unchanged between 2004 and 2005 – staff attitudes, staff lack of knowledge, general standards of service and problems relating to benefit payment.

Only 26 per cent of those who felt they had grounds for complaint had actually proceeded with a complaint (not significantly changed from 30 per cent in 2004), representing just three per cent of all respondents. IB and IS customers and those aged 50 or over were less likely to complain than JSA customers, Jobcentre users, people aged under 25 and shorter-term claimants.

Of those who did not proceed with a complaint, the main reason was the perception that 'the office won't do anything' (increased from 18 to 28 per cent). Conversely, the perception that respondents 'couldn't be bothered' declined in importance from 31 to 17 per cent.

Amongst those who had complained, levels of satisfaction with the process of handling complaints and with the complaint outcome remain relatively low; indeed they have deteriorated somewhat in the case of the complaints process. Very few people had followed up their complaint with any further action.

### Views on Jobcentre Plus services

Respondents continue to attach high levels of importance to most aspects of service; there was very little change between 2004 and 2005 in perceived importance. Aspects receiving the highest 'very important' rating were being treated with respect as an individual and staff providing the help needed (both 87 per cent), staff respecting privacy (85 per cent) and staff being knowledgeable about the help available (83 per cent).

Overall, respondents also continue to give good performance ratings across these aspects of service, but again with little change between 2004 and 2005. The highest ratings tend to be given to aspects of how customers are treated in the 'service encounter', for example, friendliness and politeness of staff (92 per cent rating as very or fairly good), being treated with respect as an

individual (89 per cent good) and respect for privacy (88 per cent good). On the other hand, rather lower performance ratings are given to aspects relating to the quality of help provided (staff or service effectiveness), for example, finding out about vacancies (75 per cent good), the time taken for business to be dealt with (80 per cent good) and knowledge of staff about the help available (80 per cent good).

The 'service quality gap' is defined as the difference between 'very important' and 'very good' ratings. The service quality gap for aspects of staff and service effectiveness is larger than for aspects of the service encounter but the gap has reduced slightly between 2004 and 2005, especially for integrated Jobcentre Plus offices. This is indicative of a relative improvement in perceived service quality in integrated offices.

As regards aspects of the office environment and facilities, these tend to receive rather lower importance and performance ratings than aspects of service discussed above. Again there is little change between 2004 and 2005 and the largest service quality gaps relate to the amount of privacy in the office, the accessibility of the office for those with mobility problems and the amount and relevance of information. However, there has been an increase in the service quality gap for the amount of privacy in the office and the extent to which the office is pleasant and welcoming and this is most evident in Social Security offices and integrated Jobcentre Plus offices.

In relation to aspects of telephone service, respondents' perceive 'getting to speak to the right person' as the most important attribute (83 per cent very important) and performance on this attribute is relatively high – 90 per cent got to speak to the right person on their last call, significantly increased from 87 per cent in 2004. However, performance on other attributes has deteriorated, for example, 24 per cent of respondents indicated that the phone was 'constantly engaged' (up from 20 per cent in 2004) and 19 per cent indicated that the phone was not answered (up from 13 per cent in 2004).

## *Satisfaction with Jobcentre Plus services*

Overall satisfaction with services provided is relatively high, with 86 per cent of respondents satisfied (very plus fairly satisfied), and has increased significantly from 81 per cent in 2004. This compares relatively well with other public services. The highest levels of satisfaction (87-89 per cent) are reported by IB and IS customers, users of Social Security and integrated Jobcentre Plus offices, those aged 50 and over and longer-term claimants. On the other hand, JSA customers, those normally dealing with Jobcentres, respondents aged under 25 and shorter-term claimants are less likely to be satisfied (77-81 per cent).

There is a tendency for satisfaction to have increased most between 2004 and 2005 amongst those groups whose satisfaction levels are relatively high while those groups with relatively low satisfaction show little change. This indicates increasing differentiation across sub groups, particularly in terms of main benefit type, age and length of claim, with a possible 'pocket' of relatively lower satisfaction amongst younger, shorter-term, JSA claimants.

Although the majority (65 per cent) of respondents continue to perceive no change in the service over the previous year, the proportion perceiving an improvement has increased significantly from 25 per cent in 2004 to 30 per cent in 2005, with significant increases amongst IB and IS customers, Social Security Office users, respondents aged over 25 and longer-term claimants.

The main desired service improvements identified by respondents were better communication between departments and with customers, a better and quicker phone service, better information on benefits, jobs and training opportunities and more knowledgeable and better trained staff.

## Jobcentre Plus integrated areas

Over a third (35 per cent) of all respondents to the survey lived in areas covered by new integrated Jobcentre Plus offices, an increase from 25 per cent in the 2004 survey.

Awareness of the Customers' Charter in integrated areas at 29 per cent has not increased since 2004 and is now consistent with the average for all customers. The extent to which respondents in integrated areas had felt like complaining or submitted a complaint was also no different from the aggregate picture.

Staff attitudes remained the dominant reason for feeling like complaining, as was the case for all respondents. There was a significant reduction between 2004 and 2005 in the proportions of respondents in integrated offices stating that they did not know the procedure for complaining and that they were worried about the repercussions of complaining.

Respondents in integrated areas gave relatively high performance ratings to the aspects of service considered in the survey but there are still significant service quality gaps for key aspects of service effectiveness such as 'finding out about benefits', staff knowledge and staff finding out needs and providing the help required.

As regards aspects of office facilities and environment, the performance ratings were higher than those given by users of Jobcentres and Social Security offices in non-integrated areas although there are still significant service quality gaps on the amount of privacy in the office, accessibility for those with mobility problems and the provision of relevant information.

Overall satisfaction (87 per cent satisfied) is not significantly different from the average for all respondents (86 per cent) and has increased between 2004 and 2005 broadly in line with the aggregate picture and with changes for Social Security office and Jobcentre users.

The picture is positive for integrated offices in terms of respondents' perceptions of change in the service over the past year, with 34 per cent perceiving an improvement compared to the average of 30 per cent. This proportion increased between 2004 and 2005 broadly in line with the average for all respondents.

The full report of these research findings is published for the Department for Work and Pensions by Corporate Document Services (ISBN 1 84123 881 3. Research Report 282. September 2005).

It is available from Paul Noakes at the address below.

You can also download this report free from:  
[www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/)

Other report summaries in the research series are also available from the website above and from:

Paul Noakes, Strategic Research and Modelling Division, 4th Floor, The Adelphi, 1-11 John Adam Street, London WC2N 6HT.  
E-mail: [Paul.Noakes@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Paul.Noakes@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)